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INSTITUTION

FOR THE TREATMENT OF

EPILEPSY,

AND OTHER OBSCURE DISEASES OF THE

~~BRAIN AND~~ NERVOUS SYSTEM.

LONDON :

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FOR THE TREATMENT OF

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~~AND~~ NERVOUS SYSTEM.

UNDER this Title, it is proposed to establish an Institution as an Asylum for the Infirm and Afflicted Indigent, *more especially those labouring under Nervous Diseases*,—a very numerous class of Patients, who are often left to mourn in secret, and brood over their misfortunes in despair. It is designed, not merely to offer relief and consolation to the Aged, but to supply the *gratuitous* aid of Medical and Surgical Science to all those who, being in a manner excluded from society by reason of their precarious condition, are apt to persuade themselves that they are *unpitied*, and—exclaiming, in the bitterness of a broken spirit, “Alas ! alas ! for me there is no help !”—sink into a state of despondency, and die.

It is quite true, that the malady of these unfortunate beings is often beyond the reach of Art, and that its origin may be veiled in obscurity: their sufferings, too, are frequently of the most heart-rending and melancholy description; incapacitating them for the active and social duties of life, and rendering them burdensome to themselves and others: their existence is embittered even when labouring under the *milder* forms of disease; and unless the prevailing causes can be checked in early life, they may, and often do, lead to the most serious results; destroying the peace of families, and entailing upon future generations a predisposition to *organic* diseases, which sooner or later accomplish the “wreck of manhood, the dethronement of

reason," or, to speak more plainly, terminate in idiocy, and the very worst forms of insanity.

Medical statistics continually illustrate this fact. We are assured, that, for some years past, insanity has been on the increase; and there is too much reason to fear that the want of proper opportunities for ascertaining, watching, and counteracting the causes of epilepsy, and the functional derangements which favour what is generally understood by "Nervous Diseases," may in some measure account for the extension of the evil which we have so much reason to deplore. There can be no doubt that many of the prevailing causes of epilepsy are referrible to the disorders of infancy and childhood; to wit, local congestions, which the period of dentition frequently induces, habitual constipation, mesenteric obstruction, and intestinal worms; to which may be added, over-feeding, vicious indulgences, constitutional changes, and the pernicious effects of late hours, tight lacing, and want of exercise. These certainly lay the foundation of many frightful maladies; and too much care cannot be taken to watch their early rise, progress, and development, so as to diminish the evil, if we cannot altogether eradicate it *. Experience teaches, that when organic disease is once allowed to get the ascendancy, the best professional skill may be unavailing: and it must be confessed, that hitherto our opportunities of observing this formidable class of maladies have been comparatively limited, because we have had no Institution appropriated to their reception. Epileptic Patients are admitted, it is true, into other hospitals, but only *now and then, and for a short time*: they are objected to on various grounds; and as soon as the complaint is pronounced *confirmed epilepsy*,

* In confirmation of these facts, we need only refer to the published Bills of Mortality. A very considerable number of children die annually of convulsions, especially during the period of dentition: and those who have been subject to fits for any length of time often suffer from the effects of an impaired constitution in after-life. It is perhaps not generally known, that infants and very young children are not admitted into any of our public hospitals.

and can be traced to hereditary causes, it is thought proper to discharge them. They shew themselves subsequently perhaps, from time to time, as out-patients; or they may apply at dispensaries, but it is only at irregular intervals: they have been told that “nothing more can be done for them,” and they regard their case as *hopeless*: their mind is kept constantly in an excited or depressed state, and they frequently become destitute of the common necessities of life. Thus there is but little chance of doing them good, or of arriving at accurate results concerning them; and years pass away without our advancing a single step.

It is only by attention to the general health of the Poor in populous cities that the dire effects of epidemics can be arrested. Now, one of the most common, as well as of the most fatal epidemics which occur in England, is a low Typhus, Continued, Remittent, or “Nervous” Fever; and a very general effect of such an attack is a debilitated state of the whole nervous system, from which persons recover very slowly, and many imperfectly. Paralysis, general or partial, contracted limbs, amaurosis, permanent deafness, loss of speech or of the sense of smell, and other affections of the brain and spinal cord, not unfrequently ensue; and, as might be expected in those at all inclining to the disease, *Epileptic Fits* *.

I forbear to comment on the other forms of disease alluded to at the head of this Paper: suffice it to say, that they depend on constitutional causes, and require continual watching, prompt treatment, and strict adherence to regimen. A vacillating system will not do; and the efforts of medical men are often thwarted by the mistaken kindness of friends, or the officiousness of a nurse. Alas, how many valuable lives have been sacrificed in consequence!

One prominent symptom of nervous complaints is a morbid sensibility both of mind and body. It is associated,

* It appears, from the Annual Reports of the London Fever Hospital, and other similar records, that, in nearly all the fatal cases which occur, the brain is the organ principally diseased, as proved by examination after death.

more or less, with irritability of temperament; sometimes a quick, but generally a cold and languid circulation; unequal spirits, sullenness or caprice, a flighty imagination, and excessive timidity, which renders it not always easy to induce such persons (especially females) to enter a hospital; neither are their relatives at all times willing to part with them. Accordingly, a great boon will now be conferred upon the poor; because provision is to be made for administering relief to them in the privacy of their own homes. Their feelings will be thereby consulted, and their real condition better understood: their minds will become impressed with the salutary conviction that a Christian sympathy is felt in their behalf; and that those who have lived in affluence and ease will be comforted under affliction, whereas they could not have obtruded their necessities on the public eye. The most wary cannot always guard against the vicissitudes of fortune; and in every great city there is abundant opportunity afforded for the exercise of philanthropy. The best efforts of the benevolent may be counteracted, however, by affections of the mind. "Hope deferred," says Solomon, "maketh the heart sick; and a broken spirit drieth the bones." How true is this!—for the most malignant diseases follow close upon the heels of misfortune. The loss of friends, disappointed hopes, and the failure of mercantile pursuits, will undermine the strongest constitution, and, when there is any predisposition, will call forth all those complaints which it will be the peculiar province of the Medical Officers of this Charity to study. The sick poor are at all times entitled to our compassion; but none among them deserve more at our hands than *Epileptics*; because, by reason of their infirmities, they are rendered helpless. *No one will employ them*; so they must either be provided for by the parish, or depend upon the labours of others. We read, that these unhappy beings were the peculiar objects of Our Saviour's care, and experienced a large share of His benevolence. In every age they claimed some portion of the public sympathy; and, lately, a very laudable example has been set us in Germany, which it is now proposed that

we should imitate. My attention was first called to the subject by Professor Mohr, who at the present time so ably fills the chair of Pathological Anatomy in the University of Wurtzburg. This gentleman, who has distinguished himself by his zeal in the cause of Science, conducted me over the Epileptic Asylum in that city; and I could not but feel, when I beheld how much good was there accomplished, that it was a reproach to us that we had not a similar Institution in England*. I am convinced, that in this country many important facts are overlooked, which, if attended to, might, in numerous instances, be beneficial to our suffering fellow-creatures, even if it did not enable us to cut short their complaints; and it is not too much to hope, that (among the labouring classes particularly) if we had the patients more under our control, and a fair opportunity of watching them *at the proper crisis*, so as to enforce attention to diet, apportion the due degree of sympathy, and ensure the judicious use of the proper remedies, much misery might be prevented; and that many who are now destined to see their children dragging out a wretched existence, and perhaps sinking into a state of abject imbecility, might, by the blessing of Providence, have the happiness to behold them restored to comparative health. So true is this, that many cases which would formerly have

* This is impressed upon me again and again; for I am continually called to cases which I can only hope to *relieve*; whereas, if I could have them in an hospital, they might be *cured*. I am at present attending a young woman who is a servant of all work at a coffee-house in a crowded district in the city: she is afflicted with epileptic fits, and yet has to labour *from five o'clock in the morning until twelve at night!* Being the only servant, she is at every body's call. Her mistress is unkind; her parents are dead; she has no friends; and but one surviving relative—her grandmother—who is too poor to take care of her. The disease does not depend on hereditary causes, and, under more favourable circumstances, might be eradicated. As it is, it will probably take firmer root, and continue to the end of her days. Surely such cases as this appeal loudly to our compassion; and, in a Christian country, should be responded to. They occur very frequently. This patient, to my knowledge, applied twice at an hospital, but was denied admittance!

been regarded as *hopeless*, are not so now. There is a moral, as well as a physical system of treatment, to which the public attention has of late years been directed; but it cannot be properly followed out, unless the patient is placed under the immediate eye of the physician, in a situation adapted to the purpose: and it is obvious (for reasons already assigned) that the Epileptic *Poor* can enjoy the advantage of it only in a very limited degree. To do them justice, they should have plenty of fresh air, and be attended by nurses who, being accustomed to the management of such persons, are able to distinguish between their *real* and their imaginary wants:—in fact, they require a separate Establishment. We talk of the neglected outcasts of the East, whose sufferings are aggravated by filth and the cravings of hunger; but how many emaciated and dejected beings do we encounter at the corners of our streets, for whom no provision is made, and whom nobody will employ; who sit, like Lazarus, at the gate of luxury, unheeded and unpitied; and, being spurned in common with the practised vagrant, take refuge in some murky cell, or huddle together for warmth beneath the dry arches of our bridges! How many squalid, half-idiotic children are allowed to roam at large, without any attempt being made to comfort or protect them, and who, in consequence, become the victims of cruelty and barbarism! It is a notorious fact, that these wretched infants are frequently *let out by the day*, to the most vicious characters, who drag them about in the cold and wet, to excite the feelings of the benevolent; and they are sometimes drugged with opium, and shut up in a dark room, without food, for many hours, during the absence of their unnatural and abandoned parents. Magistrates, and those who frequent the haunts of poverty, well know that what I say is true*. The public cannot always discriminate

* A case lately came before the Authorities, in which a child attracted the notice of the Police by its long-continued and piteous cries. The door having been *forced* open, they found a poor little boy, covered with dirt and sores, chained by the ankle to a bed-post, in a cold, dark room by himself. The father was in the habit of beating him

between the worthy and the unworthy; and hundreds are plunged into the abyss of woe, for want of a little timely aid. I knew a young man who was educated at Christ's Hospital, and afterwards apprenticed to a cabinet-maker. He was industrious and skilful; but being subject to epileptic fits, he could never be depended on; so that, when the term of his apprenticeship expired, no one would employ him. His parents dying, he soon became distressed, and his malady increased; yet he was not considered a proper inmate for the workhouse, and the hospitals were closed against him. The poor fellow would often wander about until he was exhausted, vainly endeavouring to get work; and on more than one occasion he was brought home by the Police, having fallen down in a fit. By degrees, the few friends he had grew tired of his importunities: he then sank into a state of despondency, and three times attempted to destroy himself. At last, death put an end to his misery. This is not an isolated case. Year after year, as the population increases, the necessity of providing for the relief of persons so afflicted becomes more and more urgent: yet nothing is done! After having carefully considered, therefore, in what way the difficulty might be met, I resolved to call attention to the subject. I drew up this Prospectus, and submitted my plans to the judgment of those on whose experience and sincerity I knew I could rely. These Gentlemen acknowledged the correctness of my views, and kindly promised to assist me. We have since communicated with some of the most distinguished Members of the Profession, and shall readily avail ourselves of their suggestions. Several subscriptions have been received; and in a short time we propose to hold a Public Meeting, for the purpose of

him with a piece of rope; and had left him at eight o'clock that morning, with only two small slices of bread and butter and some tea. He did not return until three o'clock the following morning; before which time the child would not have been liberated, but for the interference of the Police: and if a fire had broken out, he must of necessity have been burnt!—See the London Police Reports for November 1843.

communicating the result of our deliberations, when I sincerely trust we shall be encouraged to persevere; for it is a case of great need, and one in which every benevolent heart must sympathise.

The following is a brief outline of the proposed character of the Institution. As we desire to combine the advantages of a Dispensary with those of an Hospital, it has been suggested that we should *commence* by prescribing for Out-patients (as stated at page 6), and for Children who may be brought to the Institution by their Parents; seeing that in this way, a great amount of good may be effected at very little cost. We shall not wait, therefore, until the entire plan can be carried; but fix on some convenient locality, and open our doors, without reserve, to all whom our limited means may thus enable us to benefit. Subsequently, when the funds permit, a house will be taken in one of the suburbs, or near the Parks, for the reception of those whom it may be deemed proper from time to time to select from among the Dispensary patients;—that is, of cases which afford a prospect of relief—*not incurables!* *The Medical Appointments at both Establishments will be honorary; and the Poor will require no other passport for admission than their affliction: they need only present themselves, and make their complaints known.*

Moderate occupation of the mind, in the cases which we shall have to treat, is of the utmost importance: nothing should be omitted which is calculated to divert the attention, and counteract habits of despondency and indolence. Our object is, not merely to arrest the progress of disease *for a season*, but, by a patient investigation of the existing causes, as much as possible to obviate its melancholy tendency, and prevent its *recurrence*. In order, therefore, to render the Hospital department *complete*, it should be furnished with baths; there should be a free circulation of fresh air; exercise and amusements, adapted to the condition of each individual, should be provided; and it would be well if those who are sufficiently convalescent could have an opportunity afforded them of working a little every day (according to their health and ability) at some

useful trade with which they are familiar ; such as, turning, spinning, weaving, modelling, bookbinding, shoemaking, tailoring ; and the women might employ themselves with their needle. Children should be taught to knit and net ; and to make lint, and list capes ; and the system of *instructive games*, introduced by that excellent man Dr. Fröbel of Blankenburg, but little known at present in this country, might also be adopted with great advantage. The Medical Officers would of course determine how much their respective patients may be able to do ; and care should be taken not to exceed the prescribed limits. Every one should repose at intervals ; and a proper time should be allotted for meals, and for walking in a garden, or under a colonnade, according to the state of the weather. They should be reminded, that they are to work for *exercise* or *amusement* only, and not with a view to their *subsistence* ; and the rules respecting rest and recreation should be strictly enforced by overseers appointed for that purpose. They might be allowed to see their friends at reasonable hours ; and those who are unable to walk should occasionally be wheeled round the grounds in an easy chair.

Every thing manufactured at the Hospital should be handed over to the House Steward, and placed in a room devoted to that purpose. The same having been duly registered, and a liberal price set on each object, according to its supposed value, one half of the sum specified should be given to the patient who made it (notwithstanding the materials were provided by the Institution), and the remainder should be appropriated by the Council to the uses of the Charity.

It is obvious, that in this way a large quantity of useful articles of clothing would, in a short time, be accumulated. These I would distribute among *the sick and destitute* : other objects might be sold, periodically, for what they would fetch.

Would that we had it in our power, then, to accomplish such an undertaking *at once* ! It is clear that the plan is not only calculated to afford the best means of observing a very important class of diseases, concerning which we have but few statistics, and which, under ordinary circumstances,

are, for the most part, obscure and difficult to manage ; but it promises to inculcate good principles, and encourage industrious habits among the Poor. Moreover, at a time like the present, when so much real misery is known to exist, it would be no trifling gratification to the afflicted inmates of such an Asylum to reflect, that, through the kindness of their benefactors, they were enabled to earn something for themselves, and contribute to the relief of their distressed fellow-creatures.

The extent of the Charity must depend on the contributions of the Public. We should like to commence with a few beds ; but if we cannot, we must limit our services, for a time, to Out-patients. We are very sanguine, however, that, by degrees, we shall be able to carry the whole of our plan into execution. We have made a good beginning ; the design is already well entertained ; and being one which possesses very strong claims, we cannot think that it will be allowed to fall to the ground, or that, the Institution once formed, the affluent will permit it to languish for want of funds.

It is proposed to raise money by Subscription* ; and to place the management in the hands of a Council, to consist of well-known and experienced individuals ; who will, I trust, by the blessing of God, be enabled to found an Institution which shall be worthy of our country, and of the cause in which we have embarked.

WILLIAM HOLT YATES, M.D. F.R.A.S., &c.

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53 Woburn Place, Russell Square,

Nov. 17, 1843.

* The Subscription of a Guinea annually, to constitute a Governor. The Subscription of Two Guineas annually, to confer extra privileges. The payment of Ten Guineas in one sum, to constitute a Governor for Life ; but it is not impossible that, hereafter, the Life Governor's Fee may be arised.

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Dr. HOLT YATES, 53 Woburn Place, Russell Square.